

Tooting will test Wanderers' form

WITH four 'friendly' victories and 14 goals behind them in five games, Wycombe Wanderers can look forward to the start of the new season tomorrow (Saturday) with confidence when they take on Tooting and Mitcham at Loakes Park in the Rothmans Isthmian League.

When Ted Powell was announced as successor to Brian Lee, the club's most successful ever manager, it heralded the start of the new era at the club. Already Ted has made a big impression by

signing on as many as nine new players and playing a similar brand of attacking football to which Wycombe fans have become accustomed over the last eight years.

Wanderers have been steadily improving in every match to date. They began with a 2-0 reverse against Derby County but then beat Wimbledon 2-1 after a stormy game, Spennymoor 2-1, Redditch 5-2 and Dunstable 5-1. Fourteen goals in five games is good going by anybody's standards but it

remains to be seen how the players will cope with the extra pressures of league football.

Although delighted with his team's performance so far, Powell still feels there is a good deal of work to be done. "I only hope the crowd will be patient with both the players and myself. It takes time to build a team and we need the support of the crowd," he told me this week.

Wanderers start their campaign in the league with two

home games but neither look easy. Tomorrow's opponents, Tooting, won national acclaim after last season's run in the FA Cup when they reached the fourth round before going out at Bradford City. Only one player, skipper Ron Howell, has left them during the close season. He has joined Leytonstone.

Tooting have a new manager in Jack Payne who has taken over from Roy Dwight, now with Dartford. They are a well balanced side that will give Wycombe's pre-season form a thorough testing. The defence is sound with Steve Grubb outstanding in the air while their front line contains two of the most dangerous players in the league. Nick Glover is a consistent marksman while Alan Ives is always menacing on the flank.

NEW SIGNINGS

The South London side have won three, drawn one and lost one of their friendlies and may include new signings Dave Yerby and Bob Kempkin, a former Scotland Under 18 international.

Wycombe's line up is a matter of speculation as the manager will not name his side until tomorrow. Powell has a difficult job on his hands in sorting through many talented players.

Although Alan Phillips and Keith Mead looked a little suspect against Dunstable they are likely to be the centre halves, with John Maskell in goal. Paul Birdseye will be one full back with Mick Sorenson or Bobby Davies the other. If Sorenson gets the vote, Birdseye is likely to switch to left back.

The form of Alan Davies in midfield must make him a cast iron certainty for a place while Howard Kennedy played so well on Tuesday it is hard to see him excluded. Mick Holifield, despite lacking match fitness, is my bet for the third midfield man, although Powell might plump for Gavin Fraser, whose vision and distribution have been impressive.

Upfront, the line-up is likely to be Tony Horseman, Ian Pearson and George Cleary. 'Bodger' has a strained back but may be fit but the manager has Steve Pratt, Dylan Evans and Tony Price standing by. Pearson, top scorer in Plymouth's reserves for the last two years, has come on with every game and looks an extremely talented player.

He has already made his mark while Cleary is an ideal goal poacher. All three forwards are dangerous inside the box and if Horseman is fit, it will be interesting to see how they perform over 90 minutes.

John Priestley is the probable substitute having worked as hard as anyone in the friendlies. He can play almost anywhere on the field and will be a very useful member of the squad this term.

Powell, who has tried over 20 players so far this season, has released three — Grenville Baverstock, Rod Best and Dave Hatton — and hopes to trim his squad down to 17-18 players in the near future.

S.E.